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### This story first appeared in:

Daily Press and Argus

Sunday, November 30, 2003

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## Advice for those taking the first step

Daily Press & Argus

Adopting a child is a big decision for a family.

It's also a big process that starts with a search for a reliable adoption agency. Private agencies facilitate adoptions, as do state agencies, such as the Michigan Family Independence Agency.

To start, contact an agency, either private or government, said Natasha Christopher, an adoption facilitator with Spectrum Human Services in Southfield. The longest part of the adoption process is the mandatory home study, she said. This complete check of background, income, character and house sometimes takes awhile, but is necessary to ensure children are welcomed by parents who can take care of them.

"Do your homework," suggested Devota Nall of Fenton, who has adopted seven children with her husband, Ed. Going on the recommendation of people who have adopted is a good idea. Be wary of agencies that make promises of fast, easy adoptions, she said.

Although many families want to adopt babies, older children and teenagers need families, as well.

"We really need homes for older kids, too," said Nall.

Natasha Christopher highly recommends a Web site for the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange ([www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org)) to people willing and able to adopt older children. The site offers a photo and brief biography of several permanent wards of the state who need homes and often special care.

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Phyllis Myers, an adoption social worker for Alliance for Adoption in Southfield, a branch of Jewish Family Services, said the adoption agency is really a partner with the family through the adoption. In addition to doing the home study, she counsels families to face big questions: the social impact of adopting a child of a different race and the emotional impact of raising a child not born to them. It's best to halt an adoption if the family isn't ready for these issues instead of creating an unhappy situation.

"We don't adopt to save a child," Myers said. "We adopt to build a family."

The adoption agency also helps with resources to cover the cost of an adoption, which can be as much as \$20,000 (adopting through the state's Family Independence Agency is less costly). There are financial resources available, said Myers.

Like the preparation before a natural birth, the process of adoption can be difficult.

"Be careful, be patient," advised Lisa Martin of Howell, who recently adopted an infant. Her husband chimed in: "Waiting is the hardest part."

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